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ABSTRACT

A study examined the willingness of 101 Mexican American migrant women to attend school to train for a different job. Personal interviews were conducted with women in Wisconsin, Minnesota, and North Dakota. Overall, four-fifths of the respondents expressed a willingness to attend school in order to train for a different job. Chi-square analyses of the data indicated that of the five characteristics treated as independent variables three (age, education, and ability to speak English) were significantly correlated with a willingness to attend school, whereas two (family size and years in agriculture) did not appear to influence respondent's attitudes toward returning to school. According to the data collected, women who were younger, better educated, and better able to speak English were more likely to be willing to return to school. Of those respondents willing to return to school, 45 percent expressed an interest in professional and technical jobs, primarily in teaching and nursing. Jobs related to clerical and sales occupations elicited the second highest level of interest (30.7 percent). The two most-preferred training methods were on-the-job training and training for a skill at a vocational school. (MN)

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Educational Interests of Mexican American Migrant Women

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Based on Dr. Sletten's doctoral dissertation at the University of Wisconsin, Madison under the supervision of Dr. Beatrice Petrich. Manuscript reviewed by Dr. Terrie Shannon, University of Minnesota, Duluth.

[1]Sletten, Rennae C.G. Mexican American Migrants' Characteristics in Relation to Interest in Education, Specifically in Textiles and Clothing and Their Perceived Clothing Problems, unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1981

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Educational Interests of Mexican American Migrant Women

This study investigated the educational interest of 101 Mexican American migrant women, specifically their willingness to go to school to train for a different job. Personal interviews were conducted in the states of Wisconsin, Minnesota, and North Dakota. Overall four-fifths of the women indicated that they would be willing to go to school to train for a different job. Chi-square analysis of the data showed that of the five characteristics treated as independent variables, three had a significant effect on willingness to go to school: age, education, and ability to speak English.

Educational Interests of Mexican American Migrant Women

In 1965 there were approximately 466,000 migratory farm workers in the United States, in 1981 there were only about 115,000 (U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, 1982, p. 401). According to Slesinger (1979), factors contributing to the displacement of the migrant workers have been new legislation to protect them such as certification of migrant camps, mechanization of the planting and harvesting of crops, and new chemical products such as pesticides which eliminate hoeing of fields (p.1).

Job opportunities are limited for the Mexican American migrant workers because many are poorly educated and some do not speak English. Almost half of the 382 migrant workers in Wisconsin interviewed by Fernandez and Folkman (1975) felt that their job opportunities were limited because of their inability to speak English (p.68).

Of the options cited in the literature for helping the displaced migrant workers find new jobs, educating

or retraining seems to have the most support. Before an educational program is implemented for any group of individuals, their needs, interest, and willingness to attend school should be assessed. Few studies (Fernandez & Folkman, 1975; Ivey, Moore, Orr, & Ulibarri, 1965; Tindall, 1971) have been conducted on adult migrants concerning their interest in participating in educational programs.

In their four state study of the educational needs of migrant workers Ivey et al. (1965) found that adult migrants feared returning to school. Asked if they would attend tuition-free adult education classes, responses included: "Yes, but we are too old to learn anymore," "I am too stupid to learn," and "I am so far behind I do not think I can learn anymore" (p.32).

Studies by Fernandez and Folkman (1975) and Tindall (1971) however, showed a willingness on the part of the migrants to attend school. For example, Fernandez and Folkman (1975) found that one-third of the migrant workers in Wisconsin would remain in the state for vocational training (p.6).

This study adds to the literature on Mexican American migrant workers by assessing educational interest of one segment of the population, women, from

a tri-state area and providing a descriptive profile of that segment.

Purpose of the Study

The objectives for this study were threefold: 1) to develop an instrument to measure migrant workers' willingness to go to school, 2) to determine if there were differences in their willingness to go to school in relation to their demographic characteristics, and 3) to provide a descriptive profile of the Mexican American migrant woman. This assessment could be used as one resource for planning educational programs for this target population.

Studies have indicated that variables such as age and level of education do have an effect on an individual's interest in retraining (Kornegay, 1978; Ivey, et al., 1965). In light of this, it was hypothesized that the following characteristics would have an effect on the willingness of the Mexican American migrant women to train for a different job: age, level of education, ability to speak English, size of family, and number of years worked in agriculture.

Methodology

Instrumentation

An instrument was developed specifically for the

population under investigation. Questions were developed from the literature regarding Mexican American migrant workers (Fernandez and Folkman, 1975; Ivey et al., 1975: Slesinger, 1979; Tindall, 1971). To ensure validity the instrument was reviewed by eight professionals who work with Mexican Americans. The professionals evaluated the instrument to ensure that 1) questions were eliminated which asked sensitive information such as income, 2) questions were phrased so that migrant workers could easily understand them, 3) questions covered the necessary information needed to develop an education program, and 4) overall content was valid. Revisions were made based upon their recommendations. The Wisconsin Survey Research Laboratory provided assistance on the format of the questionnaire.

The final step was a trial test with five Mexican American migrant women. Their responses were analyzed and further refinements were made in the instrument.

Population and Sample

In Wisconsin, a member of the Board of Adult Vocational Technical Education recommended 28 migrant camps to contact, those which hired women and were the most amenable to granting interviews. Letters were

sent to the camp directors informing them of the research project, and 13 granted permission to interview at their camps. Based upon the information received from the camp directors (dates and hours permitting access to their camp) four camps were chosen.

Data collected in Minnesota and North Dakota were obtained through various sources including migrant camps, summer migrant schools, a migrant council, and a church fiesta. Phone calls were utilized to explain the purpose of the study and to request permission to interview. Of the 121 women contacted, 101 consented to be interviewed. The researcher conducted the interviews, 22 of which were administered in Spanish.

Data were secured from May to August, 1980.

Data Analysis

For testing the hypotheses a chi-square analysis was used because it is the most common research tool for testing the significance of nominal data. Frequencies were calculated for responses to questions which provided descriptive data regarding the migrant workers.

Results and Discussion

The findings are presented in two parts: 1) summary of

subject characteristics, and 2) variables examined.

Characteristics of the Sample

In the sample of 101 women, 48 women had less than nine years of education, 91 had worked in the agricultural migrant stream for more than a year, 79 could speak English, and 64 were between 14 and 29 years of age. Women interviewed ranged in age from 14 to 81.

The major reason for selecting work in agriculture was attributed to family influence such as "My parents made me work", or "It is what my husband does." Seventy-five women indicated that they liked their jobs in agriculture. Factors they liked most about their jobs were the wages and the work hours. Fifty percent of the women mentioned environmental conditions such as heat, mosquitos, wind, and rain as factors liked least about their jobs.

Variables Examined

Of the seven characteristics treated as independent variables, three had a significant effect on willingness to go to school: age, education, and ability to speak English. The following characteristics had no significant effect on willingness to go to school: family size and years in agriculture.

Table 1 Willingness to go to School by Age, Level of Education, and Ability to Speak English

	Age of Respondent*				Level of Education**				Ability to Speak English***		
Willingness to go to School	14-29 years	30-49 years	50 or more	Row N's[a]	0-8 years	9-11 years	12 or years	Row N's[a]	Yes	No	Row N's
	(Percentages)				(Percentages)				(Percentages)		
Yes	90.6	79.3	28.6	(83)	72.9	88.2	100	(83)	87.3	68.2	(84)
No	9.4	20.7	71.4	(17)	27.1	11.8	0	(17)	12.7	31.8	(17)

* $X^2(1) = .00, \underline{p} < .05$

** $X^2(1) = .02, \underline{p} < .05$

*** $X^2(1) = .03, \underline{p} < .05$

[a] Data for one migrant were incomplete

(Insert Table 1 about here)

Age

It was hypothesized that willingness to go to school was not related to age of the migrant. The results indicated that the younger respondents were more willing to go to school than were the older women. This finding is contrary to an earlier study (Tindall, 1971) which showed that age does not affect the willingness of Mexican Americans and Anglo rural disadvantaged persons to participate in educational programs. This difference could be due to the composition of the samples. Tindall interviewed females and males, whereas this study included only females. Considering the socialization of the Mexican American women it might be expected that the older women were not accustomed to receiving an education. There was a significant difference by age, thus the hypothesis was rejected.

Level of Education

It was expected that level of education would not

have an effect on the migrant's willingness to go to school. The results showed that the more education the migrant had, the more willing she was to go to school. Respondents who had completed high school unanimously indicated willingness to go to school. This finding is consistent with a previous study which found that persons with less than a high school education seemed unwilling to participate in continuing education programs (Kornegay, 1978). Perhaps the respondents felt as did those in Ivey's et al. study (1965), that they were so far behind they could not learn anymore. Also, it would be expected that migrants who have finished high school are more motivated and are more aware of the value of education. Having successfully completed high school may lead to a feeling of confidence that one can succeed in future schooling.

Ability to Speak English

Table 1 also reveals that migrants who could not speak English were less willing to go to school than those who could speak English. This finding is contrary to that found by Ivey et al. (1965); migrants who showed the most enthusiasm for education classes were those who could not speak English. Again there was a difference in the composition of the two samples.

Perhaps the males in Ivey's et al. (1965) sample felt that their job opportunities would increase if they understood the English language. Again due to the socialization of the Mexican American women, job security or advancement might be seen as the primary responsibility of the male.

Educational Interests

Of the women willing to return to school, forty-five percent mentioned interest in professional and technical jobs, primarily in teaching and nursing. Jobs related to clerical and sales elicited the second most interest (30.7%). The preferred type of training was on-the-job (96.5%), followed by training for a skill at a vocational school (89.4%). Almost one-fifth of the sample had received their high school diplomas.

Seventeen of the 101 women would not be wiling to go to school to prepare for a job which interested them. Reasons given for not going included: "I'm too old," "I have a family," and "I don't speak English." Forty-eight women said they would go to school for a different job for as long as it takes. Services most needed for the subjects to attend school were transportation and babysitters. Fifty-six of the subjects indicated willingness to train for a job in the state

where they were employed during the interview. Twenty-nine women would not take classes if they were offered in Spanish for the following reasons: "The Spanish we know is slang," "I would prefer both English and Spanish at the same time," "English is more explicit," "Texas Spanish is slang," "I don't read Spanish," or "I have studied in English."

Overall, migrants indicated willingness to stay and to train for a different job in the state where the interview was conducted. Fernandez and Folkman (1975) found similar results in their study of migrant workers in Wisconsin.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This study found evidence that Mexican American migrant women are willing to go to school to train for a different job. Results showed that age, education, and ability to speak English have a significant effect on willingness to go to school. Women who indicated willingness to go to school could speak English, were younger, and had more education than those who were not willing to go to school. Therefore, the following recommendations are made:

1. Educators should find innovative approaches to attract the older students.

2. Future research should be done to clarify the relationship between the migrant's ability to speak English and their willingness to go to school.
3. Educational classes should be taught in English.

Additional overall conclusions and recommendations are provided. First, migrants indicated strong interest in on-the-job training and training at a vocational school. Thus, vocational administrators and migrant service personnel should investigate the feasibility of vocational education programs for this population. Programs should be promoted which offer diversity and allow for upward mobility. The migrant is already employed in a job to which few are attracted. Completion of training for a wage-earning occupation such as a clothing maintenance specialist would not help the migrant out of poverty if few job opportunities existed in the area, or if wages were minimal.

Second, transportation and child care were mentioned as items needed if the women were to attend school. These services would fall under the category of financial aid. The Migrant Councils of Minnesota and

North Dakota have undertaken the task of providing financial aid to migrants for education. In Minnesota migrants are provided a training allowance to learn a skill through Minnesota Vocational Technical Institutions. For each hour in training, they are paid $3.10. In addition, $1.50 is paid for meals each day in training, plus $1.00 per hour for transportation. In North Dakota the council also pays for supplies and tuition, in addition to providing on-the-job training. The council will pay half of the employee's wages. Encouraging the migrants, especially the parents, to allow their children to take advantage of these educational opportunities is another important responsibility of educators. The following finding and statement from a young migrant help explain why.

Almost half of the respondents indicated that family influence was the reason they selected the job in the agricultural migrant stream. During an interview with an eighteen year old migrant she explained:

> "It's the parents' fault that kids are working in the fields; they just want more money. They keep having kids so they'll have more to work in the fields. My dad isn't like that; he sent us all

> through school. Just started coming to Minnesota four years ago. Dad wanted us to have the experience of working in the fields. I guess we're privileged or lucky people." . . . "My parents trust me to go to school by myself; I've earned it. Some fathers don't let their daughters go to school 'cause they'll just get married and work in the fields anyway."

Her statement, of course, is an expressed opinion, but it illustrates the influence that parents can exert on the career choices of their children. The agricultural migrant stream will continue unless education is obtainable and the value of education is also reinforced within the family structure.

Limitations

There were two major limitations of this study. The first one concerns the measurement of the dependent variable, willingness to go to school. Self-expressed interest assessed by a single question is a weak indicator of potential attendance. This study, however, adds to the literature on Mexican American migrant workers by providing descriptive data on one segment of the population, women.

The second limitation concerns reliability. The sample used in the pilot study was not large enough to test for reliability of the questionnaire.

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